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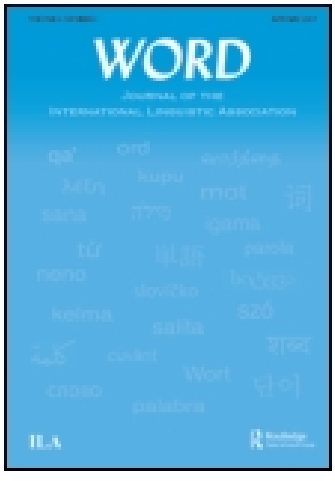

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Aspects of cultural intelligence in idiomatic Asian cultural scripts

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Aspects of cultural intelligence in idiomatic Asian cultural scripts

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This discussion explores cultural intelligence in Chinese and Malay idiomatic expressions. In terms of intercultural communication, non-Chinese speakers use different cultural intelligence schema to decipher particular aspects of Chinese culture – of which language is a component. For example, the knowledge that the numeral 8 is a symbol rife with positive connotations would help one understand the Chinese government's rationale for staging the Beijing Olympic Games' opening ceremony on the 8 August 2008 at 8.08 pm. Academic studies (Matthews & Yip 1994; Zainon Hamzah & Mat Hassan 2011) have suggested that Chinese and Malays engage linguistic, rhythmic, and mathematical intelligences to communicate. In fact, idiomatic constructions such as reduplicated phrases are considered useful teaching material for learners in Chinese conversation (So & Harrison 1996) and written Malay communication (Sew 1998). In this vein, data consisting of 14 Malay and 14 Mandarin idiomatic expressions are examined and the collative patterns involving numbers and words serializing different kinds of information analyzed. A foreign-language curriculum could thus incorporate these cultural elements together with teaching grammar rules. The addition is a value-adding component, as it leads to enhanced cultural intelligence in foreign-language learners.

Keywords: Chinese idiomatic expressions; cultural intelligence; communicative act; indexical signaling; Malay idiomatic expressions

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1. Introduction

In preempting the dangers of simplifying learning, Appelbaum (2004) warns of the fallacy of dividing intelligences into categories, as these are a combination of unbounded entities. Multiple Intelligences may be perceived as a simple theoretical division that results in numbers being part of the mathematical or logical domain and words to the linguistic domain (Gardner 2006; Lazear 2003). Linguistic intelligence, however, is a concept wrought with socio-cultural complexity. Nolan (2004) highlights one of the problems of linguistic intelligence – that prioritizing one particular discourse in what is in reality a plurality of discourse types effectively denigrates other discourse varieties.

This results in a power struggle of sorts. An example can be found in the reintroduction of Malay as the medium of instruction for education in Malaysia – a move that was problematic both politically and socially. The contentious issue of language choices is a direct consequence of academic results in public education and is a significant matter in certain Southeast Asian countries (Hashim 2009: 47–8):

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> The Malaysian Ministry of Education has announced that there will be a switch back to Malay as medium of instruction for maths and science. The reasons given are the poor success rate of the implementation of English for the teaching of maths and science, and the pressure by parents and teachers from both national and Chinese and Tamil schools for a move back to Malay and the vernacular languages for these two subjects …. The switch will take effect in 2012 to give teachers enough time to prepare for the change; and the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka and the National Institute of Translation will be tasked with translating science, technology and maths terminology into Malay. In addition, in lieu of using English for the teaching of maths and science, the time allotted to English lessons will be increased by 14% for the time being, up to an increase of 70% starting in 2012.

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In response to rapid globalization, a recent study on global localism suggests that popular culture is a necessary tool to reassert local identities and preserve native culture (Kansu-Yetkiner & Oktar 2012). The understanding of cultural grammar is a means toward 'glocalization'. In Brunei and Malaysia, young educated native Malay speakers accord prestige and a higher economic value to English and English cultural products (Coluzzi 2012). The surveys in Coluzzi's report reinforce this finding among Malay speakers in Bruneian and Malaysian universities.

It was noticed after meeting with a Malay English-language teacher that the average native Malay speaker is unable to summon the numeral classifier for words like 'flower' and 'umbrella'. It may be further conjectured that Malay grammar categories that are not found in English will be easily eroded among those who speak increasingly less Malay due to work and other aspects of life. Native grammar attrition is an issue any multilingual speaker faces. An awareness of the need for education to be (eventually) economically beneficial is necessary for both individuals and institutions to guard against an overly narrow specialization. A morbid image of a dismembered body that represents the skilled labor a capitalist society desires but that is incapable of generating creative ideas itself, serves as a warning (Raduntz 2005).

Cultural grammar is a good choice as the core area in first language and mother tongue education as it contains idioms and proverbs that are inherent in the languages' grammatical structures. These idiomatic expressions are recognizable as wise sayings or advice whenever they are invoked verbally during face-to-face interaction, or written communication. Studies reported in Matthews and Yip (1994), So and Harrison (1996) and Sew (1997, 2008) illustrate that proverbs and idioms form a useful mode of expressive communication in daily interaction.

This discussion examines idiomatic Malay and Chinese expressions as relevant poetic and cultural elements that develop strategic thinking with regard to cultural intelligence (see Literature review). The scope of the study is the intersection between linguistic and numeral structures within select Chinese and Malay proverbs. (Chinese in the discussion includes Cantonese and Mandarin.)

2. Idiom as literary freezes

There is a basic difference between words and numbers and yet these two categories may be combined to form a repository of culture. The combination of words and numbers generates literary freezes, such as proverbs and idioms, that in turn form part of the content for measuring linguistic intelligence. While words form the underlying semantic elements of linguistic intelligence, numbers invoke quantitative classification. It is

intriguing to see how languages and mathematics – taught separately through varying pedagogical techniques with differentiated materials and textbooks – collocate to capture the essence of linguistic intelligence in a speech community.

Idiomatic expressions contain certain meanings that conserve the common cultural and logical beliefs of a particular speech community. Numbers and words thus generate an interesting interplay of partitive reference within an idiom. It is interesting to note that these idiomatic combinations are observable in the cultural grammar of many speech communities. Some of the idiomatic expressions include 两面三刀 in Mandarin; *dua kali empat* in Malay; 一を聞いて十を知る in Japanese; ยิงทีเดียวได้นกสองตัว in Thai, or 'once bitten twice shy' in English.

The cited Mandarin idiomatic expression contains an intersection of numbers – a distributive 'two' (两) and number 'three' (三) with the Chinese character 'face' and character 'knife' to mean 'double dealing' and 'back stabbing'. Along this vein, the Malay idiomatic expression combines an intersection of 'two' (dua) and 'four' (empat) with the word 'multiply' (kali) to metaphorically denote two parties behaving in a similarly negative way, a situation we might describe in English as the pot calling the kettle black. Likewise, the Japanese idiom combines numbers one and 10 with the kanji characters for 'hear' and 'know' to form the phrase 'a wise man hears one and understands ten'. The Thai proverb illustrates its English equivalent 'to kill two birds with one stone'. There is also the added implication that one might equate from being 'once bitten and twice shy'.

A basic functional pattern can be observed in the number distribution of these idiomatic freezes. All of them contain consecutive numeral serializations that intensify with every increase. The increase of the numerical value in the idioms runs is one, two-fold, four-fold and 10-fold in the Mandarin, Malay, Japanese and English examples respectively. Quantitative mathematical increments lead up to a predictable outcome in all these expressions and poetically augment the intent of these phrases.

3. Literature review

This section contains selected studies on Malay and Chinese proverbs and idioms that have received considerable attention from many scholars. The literature review begins with an examination of existing analyses on Malay proverbs (Hussain 1991).

In his analysis of Malay proverbs, Tham (1977, 1990) observes a close relationship between humans and animals and it is this relationship that often serves as a metaphor for social status. In a hierarchy such as that between the royalty and the subjects, large and strong animals such as the tiger, eagle, elephant, hornbill and the mythical garuda are representative of the Malay aristocracy whereas small animals such as the sparrow, mousedeer, fowl, duck, termites, goats often represent the *rakyat* (proletariat). Interestingly, Tham cites Malay proverbs such as 'pipit hendak menjadi enggang' (the sparrow wishes to become a hornbill); 'ular lidi hendak menjadi naga' (the tiny palm snake wants to be a dragon); and 'enggang sama enggang', 'pipit sama pipit' (the hornbill pairs with the hornbill, the sparrow pairs with the sparrow) as examples of the admonition against social ambition and desired acceptance of low status in this culture (Tham 1990: 49, 102).

The notion of linguistic relativity is the focus of a recent study on Malay proverbs. This study raises two points. Firstly, that language affects thinking; and secondly, that if metaphysical, epistemological, ethical, logical and aesthetical reasoning are observable in

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Malay proverbs, then the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis may be accurate. Linguistic relativity is thus used as the underlying principle for connecting Malay behavior with descriptive elements in Malay idiomatic expressions (Zainon Hamzah & Mat Hassan 2011: 49):

> Daripada peribahasa-peribahasa yang dibincangkan, jelas membuktikan peribahasa menyingkap hubungan logik antara bahasa, budaya dan pemikiran manusia penuturnya … Secara universal, hubungan bahasa dengan pemikiran yang terpancar dalam peribahasa Melayu adalah benar dan terjadi secara sistematik, logik dan suatu yang malar. Dengan demikian hipotesis Sapir-Whorf dapat diterima. Malah pendapat Sapir-Whorf ini juga boleh diaplikasikan dalam meneliti aspek perilaku dan kebahasaan bangsa Melayu.

From the proverbs discussed, it is proven clearly that proverbs contain the relationship between logic and language, culture and thought of the language speakers … Universally, the association between language and thought as reflected in the Malay proverbs is true and developed systematically, logically and consistently. As such, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis could be accepted. In fact, the notion in Sapir-Whorf may also be applied for examining aspects of Malay behavior and language use (my translation).

Even if linguistic structures have a considerable impact on thinking patterns (see, for example, Coluzzi 2012), the sampling of the Malay proverbs used in the study points to the environments in which the Malay proverbs originated. Metaphysical, epistemological, ethical, logical and aesthetical components cannot be concluded as constitutive of Malay thinking not least as thinking patterns are neuron-based (Sew 2004). Cultural-linguistic artifacts that may be used as representative of Malay cognition may be varied in forms. These forms may include songs, dramas, graffiti, paintings, poems, textile designs and carvings among others. Malay cognition is an unbounded entity involving different types of intelligence processes stimulated simultaneously at different brain hemispheres. Attempting to make use of proverbs is inadequate as there are equally many types of Malay literary forms, including *pantun* and *sajak* (Malay poems), that are capable of reflecting Malay thought patterns (see Mansor 2012).

In an analysis of gender ideology as depicted in Malay proverbs, Bahiyah Abdul Hamid and Hafriza Burhanudeen (1998) examine three types of Malay literary freezes. Three focus areas are identified – namely human nature, a lapse in morality and immorality. Looking at the proverbs '*ibarat bunga sedap dipakai, layu dibuang*' (like a flower, is appreciated when it smells good but discarded when it has wilted); '*laksana kumbang menyeri bunga, kumbang pun terbang, bunga pun layu*' (a bee helps glorify a flower; when the bee flies away, the flower will wilt); and '*seperti tebu airnya ditelan, ampasnya dibuang*' (like the sugarcane, its juice is drunk but its husk discarded), for example, the researchers claim that women are accorded a higher status than their male counterparts:

> The metaphors used liken a woman to a 'flower' … or to the 'sugarcane'… women are referred to as elements of the flora and fauna of the Malay world which suffer negative consequences due to the actions of men: they wilt and die … These metaphors when used to denote women within the textual structures extol them, and at once, suggest that women are cherished, respected and revered in Malay society (Abdul Hamid & Burhanudeen 1998: 153).

The researchers' conclusion may be challenged on multiple grounds. Firstly, the flower and sugarcane – metaphors that represent women – are static objects compared to the bee metaphor that represents men – capable of travelling from one flower to another. In syntactic construction, the metaphors representing women are preceded by the subject

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position metaphorically representing men. This suggests a top-down active-voice syntactic order in the Malay proverbs that reflects a certain gender hierarchy. In other words, men are seen to hold power over women. The last proverb, for instance, appears to indicate a dominant male capable of inflicting damage over the metaphor representing women (cf. Chapter 5 in Sew 2009 for more details).

In a recent study of cultural translatability from Mandarin to Malay, Goh outlines a series of strategies to manipulate bilingual equations. This includes using literal translations, synonyms, explications, functional mapping, loans and footnotes among others to translate Mandarin cultural references into Malay. In the analysis, Goh argues that Mandarin idiomatic expressions require more than one strategy of translation. For example, '风水大师' (Feng-Shui Master) is translated into Malay as '*ahli nujum feng shui*' through a combination of functional mapping and transliteration (Goh 2012: 178). A compounded process of translation involving functional mapping and gloss occurs when 大师 (guru) is translated as *ahli nujum* (fortune teller) while Feng Shui is directly transliterated. The difficulties in translating such terms suggest further that idiomatic expressions are core cultural components. Learning a language, therefore, requires the introduction of different cultural schemata.

The review then turns to selected studies on Chinese idiomatic expressions. In a pedagogical study on Cantonese idioms published in *Journal of the Chinese Language Teachers Association*, So and Harrison (1996) report that idiomatic expressions may be useful teaching materials that enhance cultural familiarity in language learning. In establishing a list of 50 idiomatic XYY Cantonese phrases relevant to teaching and learning, the two researchers compiled 142 Cantonese idiomatic phrases of a XYY structure judged by 116 native speakers. Some of the most recognizable XYY Cantonese phrases include '*fong sat sat*' (nervous), '*gu ling ling*' (lonely), '*syn mei mei*' (sour), '*ngong g.i g.i*' (foolish), '*tau dap dap*' (bowed down), '*mung caa caa*' (hazy), '*jit laat laat*' (hot) and '*so gang gang*' (silly). This study highlights two focus areas for language educators: firstly, that teaching idiomatic expressions is crucial to foreign-language acquisition, and secondly, that much effort has already been made to develop teaching materials that may contribute to real-life conversation.

In the *Routledge Grammar Series*, A-B-B reduplicated Cantonese adjectives are identified as part of Cantonese grammar. These A-B-B reduplicated adjectives are equitable to XYY structures in Cantonese. Some of the examples listed include '*chi-lahp-lahp*' (sticky), '*dung-bing-bing*' (freezing cold), '*waaht-tyut-tyut*' (smooth as a baby's bottom) and '*yuhn-luk-luk*' (rounded) (see Matthews & Yip 1994: 165 for the accurate phonetic marking). It is pointed out that So and Harrison's claim (1996) contradicts the argument that A-B-B constructions are less productive in Cantonese.[1] The A-B-B constructions are not merely idiosyncratic compound words in Cantonese because an emigrant expressing nostalgia about Hong Kong combined these words in the following phrase in a radio interview (the phonetic marking is in Matthews & Yip 1994: 166):

> Yauhjagwai yiht-laat-laat heung-pan-pan cheui-bok-bok
> Fried-doughnut warm-hot-hot fragrant-smell crispy-crispy

The English term for '*yauhjagwai*' is 'fritter'. The above is not merely a well-formed sentence students of Cantonese can learn as the expression containing A-B-B words aptly and poetically captures the smell and memories of food. This is a fine example of cultural grammar wherein an idiomatic syntactic construction captures the emotions of a native speaker that surpasses mere conventional grammatical sentences.

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In another study, Sew (1998) records poetic expressions written on the toilet wall of a government building and compares the rhyming mode with two popular Teochew idioms. Teochew is a southern Chinese dialect that originates in the Chaozhou region of China. Currently it remains the heritage language of many Chinese speakers in Singapore and Malaysia. This review highlights the idiomatic Teochew expressions that capitalize on the dynamics of alliterative rhyming:

Orr kim orr kim; lu kua lu jip sim
[glowing dark skin; growing fonder as I look longer]
Pu gea lai hu; kiau gea lai pu
[support the rich; vilify the poor]

The rhyming sound between '*kim*' [shiny/glowing] with '*sim*' [heart] in 1 and '*hu*' [support] and '*pu*' [vilify] in 2 offers a phonetic platform that reinforces the intended message. It is observed that the two Teochew idiomatic expressions capitalize on syntagmatic phonosemantic dynamics – that is, the interplay of sound and meaning to contrast varying meanings or messages through rhyme.

The literature review shows thus far that there has been little discussion of idiomatic expressions involving numbers. This study highlights indexical signals as a form of cultural intelligence that reflects local wisdom and paves the way for more detailed analysis on Asian sayings. This study hopes to position indexical signaling as a brand of local wisdom that is a critical component for revitalizing curricula that empowers the people of a community in their dealing with globalization (cf. Jungck & Kajornsin 2012; Sew 2013).

4. Analysis of Chinese and Malay idiomatic expressions

The following is a random selection of 14 Chinese and 14 Malay idiomatic expressions that use a combination of numbers and words. Comparisons are made to ascertain three areas of indexical signaling (Table 1). The scope of inquiry contains these questions:

(1) What serial patterns are found in the numeral-based idioms?
(2) Are there patterns of positive and negative serialization in the data?
(3) How productive are the patterns of serialization in each idiomatic cluster?

4.1. Serial patterns in Chinese and Malay idiomatic data

There are several number-word serial patterns observable from the selected database. The table below contains eight idiomatic serial word-number combinations derived from the database (Table 2).

4.2. Qualifying the patterns of serialization

Each idiomatic expression's content involves linguistic and cultural interplay at various levels (Table 3). The Malay word '*anjing*' (dog), for example, is in '*sepuluh jung masuk pelabuhan, anjing bercawat juga*' negative. Furthermore, despite the stereotype that the Malays like cats, many Malay proverbs use the cat as a metaphor for bad behavior (Sew 2010).

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Table 1. Selected Chinese and Malay idiomatic data.

Mandarin idiomatic expressions	Malay idiomatic expressions
一刀兩斷 yī dāo liǎng duàn	*Satu sangkar dua burung*
Make a clean break	Two women who like a man
一诺千金 yī nuò qiān jīn	*Satu nyawa dua badan*
A promise worth one thousand in gold, or	An intimate relationship; A loving couple
A promise that must be kept	
三长两短 sān cháng liǎng duǎn	*Satu biduk, nakhoda dua*
Unexpected accident	Too many cooks spoil the broth
三心两意 sān xīn liǎng yì	*Satu dijentik sepuluh rebah*
Two minds; undecided	A criticism for one person but felt by the rest of the group
两面三刀 liǎng miàn sān dāo	*dua kali empat*
double dealing and back stabbing	two parties behave in the same way
三番四次 sān fān sì cì	*Tiga sudah berdiri habis*
Time and again	A complete evaluation involving knowledge, reasoning and skill
三头六臂 sān tóu liù bì	*Empat sudah bersimpul satu*
To have three heads andsix arms	The accumulated benefit from the four wise men*
To be extremely talented	
三茶六饭 sān chá liù fàn	*Empat gasal, lima genap;*
To offer 3 kinds of tea and 6	*dikendur berdentang-dentang, ditegang berjela-jela*
different dishes	The advice of the sages always comes in embedded forms
To be extremely considerate toward guests	
七上八下 qī shàng bā xià	*Dua ekor gajah berjuang, seekor kancil mati tersepit di tengah*
At sixes and sevens; in a mess	The weaker one destroyed in the fight of two great powers
Perturbed state of mind	
五花八門 wǔ huā bā mén	*Tujuh kali pindah jadi papa*
Multifarious	A rolling stone gathers no moss;
	Poverty due to a constant switch of jobs
六六大顺 liù liù dà shùn	*Sepuluh kali ukur, sekali kerat*
Everything will go smoothly	Carrying out the duty with much care
十全十美 shí quán shí měi	*Sepuluh jung masuk pelabuhan, anjing bercawat juga*
Perfect	Remain unmotivated to change despite the exposure to many different innovations
百发百中 bǎi fā bǎi zhòng	Sepuluh *bintang bertabur bolehkah sama dengan bulan yang satu*
To carry out a task with great precision	An irreplaceable lover or partner
千變萬化 qiān biàn wàn huà	*Merasa di langit tujuh*
Ever-changing	Marital bliss

Note: *The four wise men in the Malay proverb comprise the knowledgeable, the mindful, the skillful and the diligent.

If numbers in the idioms specify the multiplicity of a situation, the numerical sequences reflect a recurring situation unfolding in a manner dictated by a verb or adjective, or governed by a noun within the quantitative range. At an abstract level, an idiomatic expression with word-number combination conscripts many realities into a literary construction of cultural intelligence. By deploying word-number serial patterns, the idiomatic construction affixes the imaginative energy of folk images to create a structure that confines many realities (del Rosario Abayan 2010: 159).

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Table 2. Serialization patterns in selected Chinese and Malay idiomatic data.

Serial pattern	Mandarin data	Malay data
Sequential ascending order	From 1 to 2 一刀兩斷 From 2 to 3 两面三刀 From 3 to 4 三番四次 From 7 to 8 七上八下	From 1 to 2 *Satu sangkar dua burung* *Satu nyawa dua badan* *Satu biduk, nakhoda dua* From 4 to 5 *Empat gasal, lima genap…*
Sequential descending order	From 3 to 2 三长两短 三心两意	From 2 to 1 *Dua ekor gajah berjuang, seekor kancil mati tersepit di tengah*
Ascending order with an increase of 3	From 3 to 6 三头六臂 三茶六饭 五花八門	
Descending order with a decrease of 3		From 4 to 1 *Empat sudah bersimpul satu*
Ascending order in 10-fold	From 1K to 10K 千變萬化	From 1 to 10 *Satu dijentik sepuluh rebah*
Descending order in 10-fold		From 10 to 1 *Sepuluh kali ukur, sekali kerat* Sepuluh *bintang bertabur bolehkah sama dengan bulan yang satu*
Iterative order with zero increase	From X to X 六六大顺 十全十美 百发百中	
Multiplication by two-fold		From 2 to 4 *dua kali empat*

Table 3. Positive and negative serialization patterns in selected Mandarin and Malay data.

Patterns of serialization	Mandarin data	Malay data
Sequential ascending order	Negative connotation	Positive connotation
Sequential descending order	Negative connotation	Positive connotation
Ascending order increasing by 3	Positive connotation	NA
Descending order decreasing by 3	NA	Positive connotation
Ascending order in 10-fold	Neutral	Negative connotation
Descending order in 10-fold	NA	Positive connotation
Iterative order with zero increase	Positive connotation	NA
Multiplication by two-fold	NA	Negative connotation

5. Discussion

With regard to foreign-language education, learners who understand word-number intersections in idiomatic expressions are able to cultivate an ability to think as the other party in the conversation thinks, or what Ocon (2006: 51) refers to as "mind language". This development is necessary both for a leader at a workplace or for a speaker in social situations. Consider the following remarks:

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> When interacting with employees from different cultures, language barriers and cultural values must be taken into consideration in order to promote understanding. The ability to effectively communicate with others requires that words have the same meanings. However, the meaning of words is determined by a person's culture. (Ocon 2006: 50)

This discussion suggests that effective communication is determined by the speaker's competence in conveying a message with formulaic speech patterns unique to one's culture and that go beyond grammar rules and topic constructions in sentences. The ability to invoke number-word idiomatic expressions accurately, as well as avoiding certain cultural pitfalls, is a requirement. In business communication (Morrison & Conaway 2007; Wilkinson 2012), intercultural communication (Omar 2005), interpersonal communication (Tannen 1998; Sew 1996) as well as intrapersonal communication (Sew 2012), cultural intelligence is a key factor in business success and personal wellbeing. Interlocutors of different backgrounds should therefore focus on cultural strategic thinking that forms the initial stage of cultural intelligence.

Earley et al. (2006) define cultural intelligence as the capability for successful adaptation to new or unfamiliar cultural surroundings. Cultivating cultural intelligence involves three psycho-social stages – cultural strategic thinking, motivation and behavior. The development of cultural strategic thinking refers to the mental adaptation of a new cultural schema, whereas motivation involves a sustained effort in adapting a new worldview that leads to a corresponding alteration in one's action and words in the third stage of cross-cultural communication. Closely related to cultural grammar is the subtle verbal art of signaling in face-to-face communication. Clark (1996) argues that signaling is an inevitable component of a communicative act. The maneuvering of signaling may therefore be regarded as an index of communicative competency in language use. Signaling is collaborative, not least as a signal materializes through the joint participation of both listener and speaker.

That Chinese people would make a conscious effort to avoid a sum totaling $32 when offering *hong bao* or red packets is an example of politeness through the avoidance of negative signaling. This is due to the belief that the numerals three and two in the content of the *hong bao* are indexical signals of '三长两短' (see the table above for the hanyu pinyin equivalent), the Mandarin idiom that denotes mishap or unexpected misfortune.[2] Whilst skeptics may perceive cultural grammar signaling of these numbers as outlandish and unworthy of any academic attention, a parallel comparison in the English phrase 'touch wood' is studied with less suspicion.

In an example of two dyads, the phrase 'touch wood' serves as mitigation against unlucky situations in hypothetical scenarios. While the iteration seems illogical in terms of conversation maxims (Grice 1975), it is nonetheless a necessary cultural intelligence signal. It is thus tolerated as it diminishes any suspicion of ill-intention in interpersonal business communications. Indeed, it may be claimed that the inclusion of such a phrase prevents possible breakdown in business communication as the speakers of glocal English in these situations were communicating in cultural grammar, resulting in a mutually appreciated cultural intelligence.

The recognition of number-word serialization in Malay and Mandarin idioms reflects an understanding of cultural intelligence. Such idiomatic expressions invoke two out of four main criteria of signaling protocols measureable in the human brain – mimicry and consistency.[3] These two qualities are necessary to complete the communicative act of an idiomatic expression not least as a listener maintains a consistency of idiomatic

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understanding via a reference of common cultural mimicry. A parent may use the Mandarin proverb 临时抱佛脚 (lin shi bao fo jiao), literally 'hugging the leg of the Buddha at the last minute', to convey dissatisfaction with a child engaging in eleventh hour revision before an examination.[4] In so doing, the parent is invoking common cultural mimicry of disapproval against procrastination.

Contextualizing common cultural mimicry consistently is possible with an illustration of pragmatic alignment observed in commercial companies' advertisements. If an advertisement is a mass communicative effort to maintain the company's economic interest, its execution needs to secure the attention of the masses. It is thus understandable that the commercial advertising represents a constant game of subliminal messaging underpinned by common cultural mimicry. The success of the subliminal message depends on its public appeal.[5] Persuasive signaling involving the endorsement of Usain Bolt or Jeremy Lin is a common strategy.

6. Concluding remarks

Cultural grammars are relevant as an English grammar complement in a global age in which many Asian countries prioritize English as the preferred language. Cultural grammar may well be a core area in first language and mother tongue curriculums. Likewise, in foreign-language education, exposing learners to select cultural elements of a target language, including idiomatic expressions, is important. Cultural grammar, in the forms of idiomatic expressions and literary freezes, offers communicative relevance. A foreign-language syllabus containing elements of cultural grammar reflects a curriculum that prioritizes communicative competency.

Incorporating cultural grammar into content shows an understanding that language competency is more than simply adhering to grammatical rules. While these rules may be the rubrics of a basic foreign-language curriculum, the command of cultural grammar provides a platform for sustained interaction. This discussion proposes that communicative competence in foreign-language education needs cultural grammar as much as it requires standard grammar rules. Identifying and explicating the various combinations of number and word in idiomatic expressions provide an interesting area of learning for foreign-language learners that triggers an appreciation of cultural norms based on a literary and idiomatic order speech communities adhere to. Acquiring cultural grammar introduces learners to the intricate semiotics of speaking imbued with indexical signaling. This works toward a mastery of interpersonal communicative competency that constitutes the subtle verbal art of speaking a language.

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Notes

1. Matthew and Yip also claim that there is no word *chi-lahp* despite that there is *chi-lahp-lahp* (1994: 165). The term *chi-lahp*, however, is used as a common term for referring to sticky and *chi- chi-lahp-lahp* stickiness by Cantonese speakers in Southeast Asia.

2. The idiomatic expression is commonly used in Mandarin and Cantonese. The Hokkien version of this idiom is found in the song of a Taiwanese songstress, Huang Yi Ling.

3. Hayles (2012) identifies the other signaling protocols as *influence* and *activity.*

4. 临时抱佛脚 (lin shi bao fo jiao) is *to hug the leg of Buddha at the last moment,* indicating a last minute action/effort by someone that cannot salvage a situation. http://www.gaiaonline.com/forum/lifestyle-discussion/idioms-in-your-language/t.37417655_76/

5. According to Rishe (2012), Usain Bolt's success as the world record holder in the men's 100- and 200-meter sprint competition consecutively ensures many endorsing opportunities precisely because Bolt is a common cultural reference in the world and his name (face) allows for a reference of common cultural mimicry.

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